

Daniel Thomas Richards: A Personal Memory

Frank Mason

Words can only touch upon the man I knew as Dan Richards. They are like a light blanket that merely outlines the shape beneath, that describes aspects of Dan, recalls events that took place, and records a history. But they cannot complete or fill-in the deep emotions that his memories still conjure up in me as well as in others. We knew Dan as a large man in his love and passion for people and food and in his breadth of knowledge and interests. He had an enormous heart where family, friends, and colleagues lived in equal splendor. He was a man with a strong attachment to life and the joys that it could bring, even in the simplest of things, from opening a book to slicing mushrooms. We all knew that he was a knowledgeable gourmet of food and wine; that he could tell wonderful stories and relate events with ease and wicked wit; and we knew that Dan could be generous to a fault. This cookbook is a testament to Dan Richards and to the respect his colleagues and friends have for him.

He was known as Dan, Daniel, or Danny to family and friends. People knew Dan in different ways but no one, I think, knew him completely. We, all his friends and family, hold pieces of him, like some jigsaw puzzle, and if we were to put these pieces together we would still fall short of the mark. This collection of recipes honors the memory of a great friend and colleague. They give flavor, aroma, and color to an art form in which Dan ruled supreme. To sit and eat a meal with Dan was to experience friendship and camaraderie spiced with laughter. Dan celebrated a meal. His presence finished off the best of meals just like a fine cigar and a glass of cognac—things that Dan would appreciate today.

Dan was born on December 13, 1945, in Salisbury, North Carolina, to Eric Kenneth Richards, Sr., and Martha Camp Richards. He was one of seven children—six boys (Bill, Dan, Eric, James, John, and Michael) and one girl, Margaret. Though I have no direct knowledge of this, I cannot believe that Dan led an uneventful childhood. Someone like Dan could not have led a simple and orderly boyhood for surely he must have brought to his family different measures of love, exasperation, pride, tears, and anger—the same that he brought to many of us, his friends. Coming from a relatively large family like my own, I am certain that within his immediate family Dan chose sides, secured friendships, fought battles—lost and won, and established deep, lasting roots. I do know that Dan was particularly close to his youngest brother, Bill, and his sister, Margaret. Bill and Margaret are the personification of their brother in their great humor, generosity, and love; attributes that

Dan possessed in abundance. While his other brothers also share these attributes, they somehow seem more introspective and protective of their emotions and personal lives. They are the other side of Dan.

Dan Richards was not without fault. He did not suffer fools and if prompted by foolishness, ineptitude, or discourteous manner of others, he could cut deeply with his rapier tongue or go for the throat. This is not to say that he was mean spirited but, rather, was impatient. Dan's encounters with misguided salesclerks, waiters, and especially pompous individuals who, unwittingly, crossed swords with Dan, have achieved legend in some quarters. However, Dan was not blind to his own shortcomings and would occasionally commiserate over a drink how he had overachieved in his most recent encounter with a salesclerk, waiter, or miscreant. With friends and family he was solid. He took the slings and arrows hurled at him by friends and family with stoic bearing if not complete acceptance.

Friendship was very important to Dan for it represented the extended family he had acquired and nurtured across the length of the U.S. and the rest of the world. He had the unerring ability to make friends quickly with his smile, innate wit and intelligence, and his bearhug. It was not unusual for Dan to come into a room full of strangers and by the time he had made his way across the room to the hors d'oeuvres and drinks, he would know three to five people by their first names and they he. On trips to different cities in the U.S. and to various countries of the world, Dan would quickly make friends with the hotel maid or the hotel bartender. As a matter of fact, bartenders were a natural draw for Dan, who was perfectly content to sit at the bar, talking to the bartender, while he sipped on a lethal martini or some exotic drink festooned with feathers, umbrellas, or other jangling trinket.

Dan Richards was an avid collector and his collecting interest went from the sublime to the profane. The depth of his interest in all things would confound those that saw only a small fraction of the total being. His acclaimed collection of John Updike first editions, and related works, is now part of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Library. Books and people were a passion for Dan and he ran the gamut of friends from doormen to actress Myrna Loy, from health advocate C. Everett Koop to bartenders in Ibiza, Spain. One of his greatest joys was to host dinner parties for groups of four to twenty people.

In 1971, Dan began his long association with the West Coast and the Biomedical Library of UCLA when he was appointed as a cataloger. He advanced through the ranks to be head of the Acquisitions Division and, finally, served as Biomedical Library Collection Development Officer from 1979 to 1981. During his

eleven years at UCLA, Louise Darling, Biomedical Librarian, befriended and mentored Dan Richards. This was a close relationship that lasted until Dan's death in 1995. In his will, Dan left a bequest to the Louise Darling Staff Development Fund of UCLA in tribute to Miss Darling. It was somewhat ironic that on the day that Dan's ashes were spread in a grove of trees in Maine, Louise Darling was ascending into the clear, California blue sky in a hot-air balloon in celebration of her birthday. Dan would have appreciated the irony of these two events happening on the same day.

I first met Dan in 1971 when I called him at UCLA on behalf of the local medical library group to try to convince him to join the Medical Library Group of Southern California but with no success. I met him in person during the 1972 MLA annual meeting in San Diego while he was serving as the bartender at the annual UCLA Biomedical party. I remember Dan as tall and thin with a gorgeous, full, droopy mustache framed by long, flowing blond hair, and a friendly smile. Through chance, or events long faded and lost in time, we became friends. It was a wonderful friendship of two dissimilar personalities that seemed to mesh and complement each other. And over time, like a ripening piece of fruit or Gorgonzola cheese, we both got a little fuller, older, and gamier.

Dan was a born teacher. He introduced me to some wonderful foods and wines over the many years of our friendship. In our early Los Angeles days the lack of money was a major consideration so that Dan became a master at preparing meals from found things: what was in your cupboard and refrigerator. Nothing was exempt from his curiosity and inventiveness, such as a bunch of shriveled green onions lost in the corner of the vegetable crisper that he would salvage by cutting them up and whipping them into a frothy four-egg omelet with grated cheese. This he would serve as a mid-afternoon repast together with a cold glass of white wine. The kitchen became the machine of his force and creativity. In his early period, like Picasso, he could concoct masterpieces using a conventional white-enameled gas stove stuck into the tight corners of his kitchens in Los Angeles and New York. Using one or two skillets and a sauté pan he would create delightful meals saturated in butter or heavy cream. It was in Dan's kitchens that many of us learned that it was not necessarily the equipment that was important in cooking, but rather, it was the ingredients and what you did with them. It was not the Calphalon pans or the Viking stove that made the risotto just right, but the care and attention of the continuous stirring of the wooden spoon in the arborio rice while holding a perfectly chilled glass of Chardonnay in the other hand. And even if you wanted to cook the meal yourself, Dan was there to assist and add his particular flavor or twist to what had been planned for

the evening meal. You put in the work and Dan helped to make it a worthy event through his floral arrangement for the table, the placement of the dinnerware, or the sharp crease of the napkins he folded with care and attention.

A gathering of people for sharing food and conversation was always a special event for Dan. He was the great party giver. His involvement in an event usually ensured its success. However, even the most simple of party plans could become a major happening once Dan became involved. He took great interest in what was happening to friends, family, and associates. Each event, be it a birthday, a promotion or a new lover, was something to be celebrated. Meals would be planned, people invited, shopping lists developed, assignments parceled out, and drinks selected. He loved mixing people together. He took great pains in planning who would attend an event and where they would sit. Detail was very important to Dan. He addressed the planning of an event as he did his life, with acute attention to the small points and finesse to the whole. He was the consummate host. No topic of conversation was too obscure, and perhaps the more obscure the better. He befriended children, animals, and adults alike. His Thanksgiving Day dinners were legend, where he would carefully mix people around a beautifully set table or tables. Sitting around a heavily laden and decorated table would be librarians, a rare books dealer, someone's aunt visiting from out-of-town, a Monsignor, a Hollywood make-up artist, a graduate student in ethnomusicology, and someone he had met while shopping that day. These dinners were a great success. It was a great compliment to be invited to Thanksgiving dinner and an even greater honor to be asked to prepare a dish to be shared with the others.

His gift to each of us was his enduring friendship. You knew that you were friends. And one could plead justified jealousy to try to hold onto him when others came to call. And there were others—many others. However each person was a friend. No one was slighted, no one was forgotten in the passion of the moment with Dan. Each of us held him for a time; and the time spent with him was intense in its completeness and satisfaction. Though periods of days, months, even years may have separated you from Dan, the moment you were with Dan once again, time collapsed and it was the same as if that period of interruption had never happened. A typical phone conversation would begin: "Hello! I'm coming to LA next month and I'm available on Sunday afternoon of the 4th and all day Monday—but I have a dinner to cook that night. Maybe afterwards you can pick me up on the westside and we can go out and have a few drinks?"

There are two stories in this recipe book about Dan Richards that describe the vulnerable and very human Dan. Alison

Bunting relates a story about a lethal concoction called 'Old Mr. Boston's Fish House' punch and its after-effects upon Dan and Wade Bunting, Alison's husband, and their protracted, if irrelevant, conversation beneath a grand piano. Then there's Vicki Glasgow's wonderful story of Dan's spaghetti sauce, the California State boarder, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture inspector.

In 1985 Dan Richards, Ted Cordes (another friend) and I went to Spain. On our way to the resort island of Ibiza, one of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea, just east of Valencia, Dan and Ted talked excitedly about attending a bullfight on the island. Somewhere Dan had heard that Ibiza had a wonderful bullfight ring. I was unwilling to attend the innocent slaughter of a bull for the enjoyment of a few hundred people and so declined their invitation. Once we arrived in Ibiza and settled ourselves in the best hotel on the island, a stunning hacienda perched on a high cliff overlooking the azure-blue of the Mediterranean, Dan and Ted verified with the hotel's front desk attendant that Sunday would be the day to attend the bullfights. "The best bullfight in all Ibiza," the hotel clerk announced to them in heavily accented English. Sunday morning came and Dan and Ted dressed up to go into town while I changed into bathing trunks, grabbed a book, and went to sit by the pool to read, sun, and swim. I was looking forward to a few hours of time to myself. Both came by the pool to say good-bye and to plead their case, once again, that bullfighting was an art form. I shoed them away and relaxed into my chaise-lounge to take a quick nap. Not more than 15 minutes went by when suddenly I could sense that a cloud or large object had blocked the sun. I opened my eyes and there stood Dan and Ted with sheepish looks on their faces. "What happened to the bullfight," I asked. "Well," Dan began. "It seems that the front desk misunderstood my question about bullfights in Ibiza. When we asked for directions from the hotel to the bullring, the guy at the front desk said that the 'bullfight' was to take place around noon in the pool area of the hotel! It seems there are no longer any bullfights in Ibiza, but the hotel does have the 'best buffet in all Ibiza.'"

Dan's professional life changed radically when he left Los Angeles for the east. For sometime afterward, I followed his struggles to achieve a library directorship. Calls and personal visits always included his saga of the latest application for a directorship position or an interview just concluded. Sometime along in our relationship, Dan had settled in my mind into a comfortable place where I understood him at a specific level of friendship quite independent of his professional life. This was a man who possessed a great deal of love and passion for his friends but who also happened to be a brilliant librarian. When we spoke, that part of his life—his professional life—occupied

only a small fraction of our conversations or interests. So it was that I saw a different Dan emerge in the 80s and 90s. Though he still had the passions, he was now a person of substance: a person to be reckoned with in librarianship. He had entered that rarefied group that some of us called "them"—those librarians who attract attention because of their position and reputation. "He's one of them," we'd say to each other with mixed regret and pride. And he flourished in this rarefied air. He had finally achieved his goal to be a library director and he was wonderful.

I have dealt here primarily with Dan Richard's personal life. But I commend to your attention one brief paragraph from the program cover sheet, entitled "Daniel T. Richards, Dec. 13, 1945–Dec. 9, 1995," of the Second MLA Symposium on Collection Development "Managing Health Information Resources for the 21st Century," which was dedicated to the memory of Dan. The single page cover sheet includes a succinct statement of Dan's important role in collection development:

"During that short time [at NLM], [Dan Richards] reinvented Collection Development Theory. He rejected the classical collection-based approach in favor of a discriminating subject approach based on users' needs, which emphasized quality in selection decisions. He advocated mission and user-based, tailored collections. The principles he established in NLM's Collection Development Manual have guided health science librarians through the tough selection choices exacerbated by budgetary restriction."

Also, there is an excellent synopsis of Dan Richard's professional life as presented in his multi-authored obituary, which was published in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, 84(2):283–86.

Daniel Thomas Richards passed away on Saturday, December 9, 1995, at his home in Cornish, New Hampshire of natural causes, five days short of his 50th birthday. Dan had requested that his remains be cremated. A celebratory service was held in Dan's memory a few days after his untimely death but it was not until the following August that his ashes were dispersed by family and friends.

In a glade of white birch trees, between the median lanes of Highway 95, a few miles north of Bangor, Maine, the ashes of Daniel T. Richards were dispersed as Dan had requested in his will. On Saturday, August 3, 1996, around 2:30 in the afternoon, about twenty friends and family drove up from Bill and Darlene Richards' home in Dixfield, Maine, in a small caravan of cars to the spot that Dan and his brother Bill had found many years ago. Along the way, Bill Richards reminisced that whenever Dan would come up to visit family in Houlton, Maine, they would make a quick stop at this grove of trees so

that Dan could again marvel at the stark simplicity of these tall, white bark trees growing in the vast forest of evergreens and other deciduous green trees that populate this area of Maine. The grove of trees was like a bright beacon of light within the somber boredom of dark evergreens massing both sides and median of the highway as one drove up Highway 95 to Houlton. The trees served as a welcome home for Dan.

During the very brief and informal ceremony, Bill Richards spoke quietly about his brother Michael and father who preceded Dan in death and about their mother who is in a nursing home for Alzheimer patients. After a few unspoken prayers for Dan, friends and family members took turns in gently shaking Dan's ashes around the warm, moist earth and green foliage of the stand of birch trees. The gray marble urn that had tightly contained the fragile remains of Dan held our interest as the fine ash sprinkled out over the ground like a pepper mill dusting the rich earth with its pungent spice. It was somehow understood by all that Dan had come home.

Margaret, Dan's sister, shook some ashes atop a small growth of wild blueberries. "Dan would enjoy these," she said. After the last of the ashes were distributed, we quickly reconvened in our cars and most of us began the three-hour trip back to Dixfield.

Bill and Darlene had prepared a feast to honor Dan that did justice to his memory in a most fitting way. Three-dozen large lobsters were boiled in two huge vats as thick prime rib steaks sizzled on the grill; and what looked like a whole field of fresh steamed corn-on-the-cob was served up hot and juicy, piled onto plates on top of folding tables that bent under the weight of the food. Bowls of different salads, steamed lobsters, buttered corn, barbecued meat, fresh fruit, beer, and wine littered the tables. And what wine! Bill had saved and brought back to Maine about thirty bottles of Dan's best wine especially for this event. The succulent sound of bottles of French, Australian, and California red and white wines being uncorked filled the humid night air, mixing in with the sinister whir of

mosquitoes and other insects as they dive-bombed the throng of celebrants seated in the backyard. During the meal, friends and family related tales about Dan and it was hard not to understand the joyful laughter that filled our ears that evening. Later that evening, people began to head back home or to bed though there were a few who lingered near a roaring wood fire in an open pit to drink a little bit more red wine, to sip coffee, and to look into the fire and think about Dan.

I will always treasure the memory of Dan Richards and he lives in the joy he brought to each of us and in the recipes that friends and colleagues are sharing here.

